

Killer of Diet Doctor Gets 15-Year Prison Term

WHITE PLAINS, N.Y. (AP)—Jean Harris was sentenced Friday to 15 years to life in prison for the love-triangle slaying of Scarsdale Diet author Herman Tarnower, the millionaire bachelor who jilted her for a younger woman.

The sentence, for second-degree murder, means Harris, 57, must serve at least 15 years before being considered for parole unless she is given clemency by the governor at some earlier time. She will be 72 before she is eligible for parole.

"I did not murder Dr. Herman Tarnower, but I loved him very much," the former headmistress of a Virginia girls' school said in a clear voice. "I am innocent as I stand here."

Judge Wishes Her Luck

"I found you to be a brilliant woman," Westchester County Court Judge Russell R. Leggett told her. "But the best I can say to you is, 'Best of luck.'"

The judge added, "I wish that the events of March 10 never took place. . . ."

The maximum sentence would have been 25 years to life.

Assistant Dist. Atty. George Bolen asked the judge to "consider the devastating impact the defendant's actions have had on people's lives, like Dr. Tarnower, who was a decent. . . ."

At that point, Harris tried to jump up from her chair but was restrained by a touch from one of the two female sheriff's deputies guarding her.

Leggett ordered Harris taken "forthwith" to Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, the state's only maximum-security prison for women.

In addition to the second-degree murder charge, Harris was found guilty of two weapons counts. Leggett sentenced her to up to four years and up to three years on those two counts but said those sentences would run concurrently with the murder term.

Harris protested the sentence. "For you to arrange my life so I'm living in a cage every minute with irons

on is a travesty," she said.

She said she had reviewed 10,000 pages of testimony heard at her trial and insisted, "There isn't a sentence that suggests how I was guilty of intentionally hurting Dr. Tarnower."

"I did not wish him ill," she said. "No one in the world feels that loss more than I do."

A round of applause broke out in the back of the courtroom as Harris sat down.

The sentencing had been delayed by a bomb threat and a request by Harris' lawyer, Joel Aurnou, that Leggett set aside the conviction. The bomb threat proved to be unfounded and the judge denied the defense request.

The former headmistress of the Madeira School in McLean, Va., was convicted Feb. 24 of firing four shots into Tarnower, her lover for 14 years, at his estate in Purchase, N.Y., on March 10, 1980. The government said she was in a jealous rage over Tarnower's affair with his 37-year-old office assistant.